

## Eros the King and the King of *Amours*: Some Observations on *Hysmine and Hysminias*

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One striking manifestation of change in Byzantine culture in the eleventh and twelfth centuries was the rehabilitation of Eros, the ancient god of love. Not only did the revival of Greek narrative fiction in this period restore him to his dominant role in human affairs, but as the revival progressed, he became transformed from a puerile thug into something like a legitimate sovereign. In *Digenes Akritas*, the earliest of the medieval Greek romances, he figures as a violent force that disrupts the order (*τάξις*) of the aristocratic household.<sup>1</sup> But in the *Hysmine and Hysminias* (hereafter *HH*) of Eustathios (or Eumathios) Makrembolites, which represented the high point of Byzantine imitation of the Hellenistic novel, Eros is portrayed as the lord of the *taxis* which makes the world go round.<sup>2</sup> Although he is never quite trusted by the chief protagonist and narrator, Hysminias, his dominion is real enough. He is the only deity—indeed, the only figure—in the story whom the author invests with what Byzantines recognized as the apparatus of divine and monarchical authority: Eros alone comes complete with a throne, a court, a ceremonial, and a well-developed ruler iconography.<sup>3</sup>

As Carolina Cupane has pointed out in what remains the most thorough investigation of the subject, the portrayal of Eros as a *basileus* is a signifi-

cant departure not only from Byzantine literary tradition but also from its ancient models, and the departure is further emphasized in the way that the author, not content with the addition of a kingly apparatus, transforms the figure of Eros from a little boy into a fully grown youth, a *μετράχιον*.<sup>4</sup> The contemporary rehabilitation of Eros thus went beyond the mere restoration of sexual love to its ancient status; it elevated Eros to the new heights then being scaled by Amor in the love poetry of the medieval West. Cupane maintains that the Byzantine development must have been inspired by western example. In arguing this thesis, she points to the innate conservatism of Byzantine literature, its lack of a strong allegorizing tradition, and the western influences at work at the Byzantine court during the time of the Crusades. She further notes the similarity between a dream episode in *HH* and one in the *Fablel dou Dieu D'Amors*, a French text of the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, and argues that the motif is more likely to have originated in the French work because there it is more integral to the structure of the composition as a whole. Finally, she shows how when the figure of Eros the King reappeared in Greek romances of the fourteenth century, he was even further removed from the ancient type, and correspondingly closer to the western allegorical personification of Amor.

The problem with trying to trace the first appearance of the motif to western influence, and es-

<sup>1</sup>See the Grottaferrata version, ed. and trans. J. Mavrogordato (Oxford, 1956), 4.525–30; cf. P. Magdalino, “Honour among Romaioi: The Framework of Social Values in the World of *Digenes Akrites* and *Kekaumenos*,” *BMGS* 13 (1989), 198–200. For the dating of the poem, see R. Beaton, *The Medieval Greek Romance* (Cambridge, 1989), 29–48, esp. 46–47.

<sup>2</sup>*Erotici Scriptores Graeci*, ed. R. Hercher, II (Leipzig, 1859), 159–286; see esp. 2.11, 3.20 (pp. 176, 198–99). On the authorship, see H. Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner* (Munich, 1978), II, 141; S. V. Poljakova, *Iz istorii Vizantiskogo romana* (Moscow, 1979), 11 ff.

<sup>3</sup>*HH* 2.7–11, 3.1: Hercher, *Erotici Scriptores Graeci*, II, pp. 174–76, 178–79.

<sup>4</sup>C. Cupane, “*Ἐρως βασιλεύς*: La figura di Eros nel romanzo bizantino d'amore,” *Atti dell'Accademia di Scienze, Lettere e Arti di Palermo*, 4th ser. 33 (1973–74), 243–97; see also eadem, “Il motivo del castello nella narrativa tardo-bizantina,” *JÖB* 27 (1978), 229–67; eadem, “Byzantinisches Erotikon: Ansichten und Einsichten,” *JÖB* 37 (1987), 213–33. It is interesting to note that the word *μετράξις* is also used by John Tzetzes in his description of the iconography of Eros, in *Chiliads*, ed. P. A. M. Leone (Naples, 1968), 187.

pecially with trying to link *HH* to specific western texts, is that the work is extraordinarily difficult to date, and it is all too easy to slip into circular reasoning whereby the hypothesis of western influence is seen to confirm, and then to be confirmed by, the idea that the composition must postdate putative western models such as the *Fablel* and the *Roman de la Rose*. The fact is that we do not know when the author lived and wrote; the traditional date of ca. 1180 is highly conjectural. His work shows close connections with the romance of Theodore Prodromos, and with certain pieces by the rhetorician Nikephoros Basilakes, both of whom flourished in the second quarter of the twelfth century. This has led the Soviet scholar S. V. Poljakova to argue that *HH* was a source for these writers, and, far from being influenced by western models, acted as a major influence on the *Roman de la Rose*.<sup>5</sup> The argument is tenuous, and has rightly been treated with scepticism by R. Beaton in his recent study of the medieval Greek romance.<sup>6</sup> As he observes, “the evidence for Pródromos’ and Vasilákis’ dependence on Makremvolítis is far from conclusive. The connections are plain to see, but in the present state of our knowledge there is nothing in the comparison of similar passages to prove which came first.” Beaton’s analysis of the four “Hellenistic Revival” romances demonstrates that *HH* is in many ways the most developed and sophisticated of the group: it is the most refined and confident in its treatment of ancient paganism; it is the most outspoken in its assertion of Hellenism versus barbarism; it is the most sensitive—as well as the most pornographic<sup>7</sup>—in exploring the psychology of sexual awakening; and it is by far the most ingenious and satisfying in its use of the techniques, and the concept, of literary artifice, which Beaton, to his great credit, shows to be the key to understanding these texts. The implication is clearly that *HH* represents a more evolved, and therefore chronologically more advanced, stage in the elaboration of the genre. Curiously, however, the main reason Beaton gives in favor of a later date is that he sees in *HH* “a greater acquaintance with and interest in western romance literature than can be detected in any of the other Greek romances of the period.” In support of this

observation, he points out two peculiarities that have not been noticed by other scholars: the spelling of the heroine’s name, ‘Υστίνη rather than Ἰστίνη, in a way reminiscent of the Ysmaïne of the French *Roman de Thèbes*, and the fictitious place name Ἀστύκομις, in which he sees a “sly allusion” to King Arthur, *le roi Artu*. But this peculiar predilection for the letter *hypersilon* is not the crux of Beaton’s argument. His preference for a later rather than an earlier date rests essentially on Cupane’s postulation of a western origin for the image of Eros the King. Indeed, he takes her results to their logical conclusion. Less inhibited than she by the traditional dating of the work, he is prepared not only to accept that Makrembolites knew the *Roman de la Rose* as well as the *Fablel*, but also to face the chronological consequences: *HH*, in his view, is a thirteenth-century work.

While recognizing the brilliance of Beaton’s analysis, and the qualifications with which his conclusions are hedged, one has to worry whether they do not come dangerously close to the kind of circular reasoning warned against above, and one has to ask whether he has not been rather uncritical in accepting the dependence of *HH* on specific western texts. It all comes down to the image of Eros the King, and to the question whether this was so clearly and completely borrowed from western literature as to require that *HH* postdate the other romances by some fifty years. Certainly, the other western allusions which Beaton has noted in the work do not necessarily indicate a late terminus post quem. He himself points out that the *Roman de Thèbes* is a mid-twelfth-century work. As for the reception of the Arthurian legend in Constantinople, the evidence which Beaton cites via Cupane may be slightly earlier than she thought, and in any case it can be taken to indicate that Arthur was well known in Constantinople years, if not decades, before the anonymous *Prophecy of Merlin* was composed in ca. 1167–74.<sup>8</sup> Beaton himself admits that the similarities between *HH* and specific works of French literature may represent the influence not of those works as such, but rather of the *topoi* of courtly love poetry on which they were based.<sup>9</sup> We have to allow for the distinct possibility that the

<sup>5</sup>Poljakova, *Iz istorii*, 25 ff, and articles in *VizVrem*, cited in the bibliography (nos. 24, 25, 30).

<sup>6</sup>Beaton, *Medieval Greek Romance*, 78–79.

<sup>7</sup>H.-G. Beck, *Byzantinisches Erotikon: Orthodoxie—Literatur—Gesellschaft*, SBMünch (1984), 118 ff.

<sup>8</sup>Cupane, “Ἐρως Βασιλεύς,” 268, but cf. *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. R. S. Loomis (Oxford, 1959), 62.

<sup>9</sup>Beaton, *Medieval Greek Romance*, 78, with reference to E. Jaffreys, “The Comnenian Background to the Romans d’antiquité,” *Byzantium* 50 (1980), 455–86, whose conclusions are accepted by Cupane, “Byzantinisches Erotikon,” 220.

western literary motifs borrowed by Makrembolites were already familiar to Byzantines in the mid-twelfth century—either through the Second Crusade, or from the more permanent presence of western immigrants to Constantinople.

More fundamentally, we have to reexamine the basic proposition that the notion of Eros the King was one that twelfth-century Byzantium was incapable of developing for itself. The proposition is at odds with our recognition, which—thanks not least to Alexander Kazhdan—has grown greatly since Cupane wrote, of the potential for creativity and innovation in Byzantine literature. In any case, as Cupane herself noted, the royal attributes of Eros were far from incompatible with Byzantine cultural values: “Nuovo è il concetto della sua regalità, ma esso si riveste di colori prettamente bizantini: è infatti in veste di βασιλεὺς αὐτοκράτωρ che Eustazio ce lo presenta. . . .”<sup>10</sup> Beaton, too, notes that “the king of love is depicted with all the appurtenances of Byzantine imperial might”;<sup>11</sup> he further observes that the idea of Eros’ absolute power had deep roots in Greek literature, and was clearly if briefly articulated in the romances of Niketas Eugenianos and Constantine Manasses. “It is a smaller step than Cupane makes out from these rhetorical elaborations of the traditional attributes of Eros to the more fully visualized and developed iconography of Makremvolites and the fourteenth-century romances.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, without actually disputing the western origin of Eros’ kingship and all that this implies, Beaton betrays distinct unease at the idea that the motif was completely imported.

In what follows, I shall argue that this unease is fully justified, and indeed should loom much larger in our appreciation of *HH*. I suggest that not only the ingredients but also the recipe for Makrembolites’ image of Eros basileus were present in Constantinople in the mid-twelfth century.

First of all, it is clear that the iconography of the imaginary garden murals in which Hysminias first sees Eros depicted, and from which he recognizes the god of love when the latter appears to him in dreams (just as Orthodox Christian believers recognize saints from their icons), was assembled entirely from native Byzantine elements. The two portrait groups that frame the central panel of

Eros enthroned, namely the depictions of the four Virtues on one side and the Labors of the Months on the other, have long been recognized as traditional set pieces; it is worth mentioning in this context that in at least two pictures of the emperor Manuel I (1143–80), he was portrayed in the company of the Virtues.<sup>13</sup> The ekphrasis of the central scene is unlikely to have been based on any real pictorial composition, for the simple reason that it imagined Eros in an unconventional guise. But the bow and the fire held by the enthroned figure were traditional elements that might have appeared in late antique representations of Eros still visible in secular buildings of Constantinople.<sup>14</sup> The wings that the Eros of the romance has in place of legs might have been inspired by the six-winged angels, the Hexapteryga, of religious iconography; if so, they did not necessarily “risk being more absurd than impressive.”<sup>15</sup> The image of Eros on his throne<sup>16</sup> corresponds to an image that existed in Byzantine imperial art, and was well established in the literary imagination.<sup>17</sup> Texts relating to Manuel I make much of the lofty throne where he sat on ceremonial occasions.<sup>18</sup> As for the image of all kinds of humans and animals standing before the ruler’s throne, there were several likely sources of inspiration: pictures and descriptions of the Last Judgment; triumphal depictions of the emperor

<sup>10</sup> P. Magdalino and R. Nelson, “The Emperor in Byzantine Art of the Twelfth century,” *ByzF* 8 (1982), 142 ff.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Tzetzes, *Chiliads*, ed. Leone (above, note 4), whose use of the present tense even suggests that Eros was thus being depicted in *contemporary* art.

<sup>12</sup> Beaton, *Medieval Greek Romance*, 153.

<sup>13</sup> The word used in 2.7 and 3.1 is δίφρος, but in 11.4 it is θρόνος, which invalidates the translation “chariot” preferred, without explanation, by Beaton.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., cod. Coislinensis 79, fol. 2r: I. Spatharakis, *The Portrait in Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts* (Leiden, 1976), 110–11. See also the oration of Theodore Prodromos to the sebastokrator Isaac Komnenos (II), in which the latter is imagined sitting on a lofty throne, attended by Ares, the Four Virtues, Rhetoric, Grammar, Philosophy, and various ancient philosophers: ed. E. Kurtz, “Unedierte Texte aus der Zeit des Kaisers Iohannes Komnenos,” *BZ* 16 (1907), 114–15.

<sup>15</sup> Manganeios Prodromos (see below, note 21), *Bizánci Költemények Mánuel Császár Magyar Hadjáratáiról* (Βυζαντινά Ποιήματα περὶ τῶν Οὐγγρικῶν Ἐκστρατεῶν τοῦ Αὐτοκράτορος Μανουῆλ) (Budapest, 1941), ed. I. Rácz, 33–34; RHC, *Hgr*, II, ed. E. Miller (Paris, 1881), 308; Euthymios Malakes, ed. A. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Noctes Petropolitanae* (St. Petersburg, 1913; repr. Leipzig, 1976), 163, 167. Cf. John Kinnamos, Bonn ed., 184, 205–6 (where the word used is δίφρος). The chartophylax Samuel Mavropous also refers to the magnificence of Manuel’s throne in an unpublished Lenten homily of 1170: ὁ μὲν οὖν χρυσοῦς εἰστήκει τοῦ βασιλέως θρόνου ἐφ’ ὑψηλοῦ, θρόνος δχήμασι ποικιλτὸς χρυσοδέτοις δτι λίθῳ πολυτελής καὶ διαπερῆς τοῖς μαργάροις, τὸ μέγα θαῦμα τῶν ὀπουδήποτε τοικῶν ἀρχηγῶν (cod. Scorialensis gr. Y-II-10, fol. 515v.).

<sup>10</sup> Cupane, “Ἐρως Βασιλεὺς,” 259.

<sup>11</sup> Beaton, *Medieval Greek Romance*, 153.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

receiving the submission of conquered cities and peoples; literary and artistic celebrations of the cosmic ruler, or of the charismatic figure (Orpheus / David / Christ / the emperor) who charms wild beasts into submission.<sup>19</sup>

Second, the two basic constituents in the concept of Eros the King, the power of love and the image of monarchical power, were both important literary preoccupations in mid-twelfth-century Byzantium. Preoccupation with the power of love is evident not only in the romances but also in other writings: the *Progymnasmata* of Nikephoros Basilakes, particularly his *ethopoiiai* (character studies) on mythological subjects;<sup>20</sup> and an unpublished poem "To Eros" by the poet known, for lack of better identification, as "Manganeios Prodromos," whose voluminous writings, preserved in Codex Marcianus graecus XI.22, cover the period 1143–59.<sup>21</sup> From Basilakes, we should note the repeated reference to Eros as a "great potentate" (μέγας δυναστής),<sup>22</sup> and from Manganeios we should note the emphasis on the *psychological* power of Eros to inflame passion not just by invading the senses, but by penetrating the consciousness and using the mind to paint an image of the beloved.<sup>23</sup> Literary

<sup>19</sup> Last Judgment: A. Grabar, *L'empereur dans l'art byzantin* (Strasbourg, 1936; repr. London, 1971), 249 ff. The emperor victorious: C. Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire, 312–1453: Sources and Documents* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1972), 110–11, 196–97, 224 ff. Cosmic kingship and mastery of wild creatures: H. Maguire, *Earth and Ocean* (University Park, Pa.-London, 1987), 73 ff; idem, "The Art of Comparing in Byzantium," *ArtB* 70 (1988), 93–94; P. Magdalino, "The Bath of Leo the Wise and the Macedonian Renaissance Revisited," *DOP* 42 (1988), 106–7.

<sup>20</sup> *Niceforo Basilace, Progymnasmata e monodie*, ed. A. Pignani (Naples, 1983), index nominum, s.v. Ἔρως.

<sup>21</sup> Fols. 52v–53r: the text is no. 45 in the catalogue by E. Mioni, *Bibliothecae Divi Marci Venetiarum Codices Graeci Manuscripti*, III (Rome, 1973), 116 ff. My use of this and other inedita from the collection is based on my own transcription from microfilm, but it has also been facilitated by the work of M. and E. Jeffreys, who are preparing a partial edition and full analysis of the poems, and kindly supplied me with discs of their working, computerized text. It is to be hoped that the Jeffreys will finally resolve the vexed question of this author's dates and his relationship to the real Theodore Prodromos; in the meantime, I remain unconvinced by the doubts A. Kazhdan and R. Beaton have cast upon the arguments of Papademetriou: A. P. Kazhdan, with S. Franklin, *Studies in Byzantine Literature of the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1984), 87 ff; R. Beaton, "The Rhetoric of Poverty: The Lives and Opinions of Theodore Prodromos," *BMGS* 11 (1987), 12–25.

<sup>22</sup> Ed. Pignani, 184 lines 20–22, 195 lines 34–40.

<sup>23</sup> See especially lines 38–39:

καὶ δυναστεύεις καὶ κρατεῖς ἀπὸ τῶν δύθαλμῶν μου  
ῶσπερ ἔξ ἀκροπόλεως οἱ προκαταλαβόντες . . .

and lines 55 ff:

πῶς εἰκονίζεις πρόσωπα, πῶς χαρακτήρας γράφεις,  
πῶς τὰς μορφάς εἰδοποιεῖς, πῶς ζωγραφεῖς ἀγράφως,  
καὶ πῶς χαράττεις τὰς γραφάς καὶ δίχα τῆς γραφίδος;  
ὕλης χωρίς καὶ χωρίτος οὐδὲ ζωγράφος γράφει.

preoccupation with the image of monarchy is evident in the volume and intensity of the encomia that were written for the Comnenian emperors, especially Manuel I. This emperor's "divine" name (Emmanuel = "God with us"), his need for propaganda to legitimize his somewhat irregular accession, his daring deeds on the battlefield, and his lavish generosity in his early years, combined to produce an imperial image of exceptionally high profile and ceremonial magnificence.<sup>24</sup> Manuel's early years were marked by two related developments worth mentioning in the present context: the institution of a new ceremony, the prokopsis, in which the emperor appeared in glory on a raised balcony like a *deus ex machina*;<sup>25</sup> and the construction of new palace buildings in which the emperor was extensively portrayed.<sup>26</sup> In celebrating the emperor, writers of encomia played on the theme of the artistic image in a way distinctly recalling the romances' concern with artifice. The encomium is likened to a work of art; so too is the emperor, and by a further variation of the metaphor he is characterized as the artist of his deeds.<sup>27</sup>

Third, and most crucial, there is evidence that literary interest in Eros and literary celebration of the emperor became fused in the mind of at least one writer. Three of the poems that Manganeios Prodromos addressed to Manuel I flatter the emperor by comparing him with Eros, or by exalting his erotic charms.

In a text written, probably, late in 1152, we find the following passage in praise of Manuel's physical appearance:<sup>28</sup>

Τίς Ἀπελλῆς διδάσκει σε τὸ γράφειν ἄνευ ὑλῆς;  
οὐ σὺ τυγχάνεις ὁ γράφεις, ὁ νοῦς δὲ τοῦ τρωθέντος,  
ἐκεῖνος γίνεται γράφεις, ἐκεῖνος καὶ ζωγράφος,  
ἐκεῖνος καὶ χωματιστῆς καὶ γράφει τὴν εἰκόνα,  
καὶ τὴν μορφὴν χωματουργεῖ καὶ τὴν φιλτάτην ὄψιν.

<sup>24</sup> See Michael Italikos, *Lettres et discours*, ed. P. Gautier (Paris, 1972), 276–94; Niketas Choniates, ed. J. L. van Dieten (Berlin-New York, 1975), I, 59; P. Lamma, "Manuele Comneno nel paenigrico di Michele Italico," *Atti del VIII Congresso Internazionale di Studi Bizantini* (Palermo, 1951), I, 397–408 (= *Oriente e Occidente nell'Alto Medioevo* [Padua, 1968], 369–82); Magdalino and Nelson, "The Emperor," 171–73.

<sup>25</sup> M. Jeffreys, "The Comnenian Prokopsis," *Parergon*, n.s. 5 (1987), 38–53.

<sup>26</sup> In addition to buildings at the Great Palace and the Blachernae, Manuel built palaces at several suburban locations: Choniates, ed. van Dieten, 206; P. Magdalino, "Manuel Komnenos and the Great Palace," *BMGS* 4 (1978), 101–14.

<sup>27</sup> *Niceforus Basilaca, Orationes et epistulae*, ed. A. Garzya (Leipzig, 1984), 50, 52; "Manganeios Prodromos," Mioni no. 20, lines 347–54, 452 ff; Euthymios Malakes, ed. Papadopoulos-Kerameus, *Noctes*, 171–73.

<sup>28</sup> Mioni, no. 4. The date can be deduced from the poem's reference (lines 396 ff) to the recent "enslavement" of the Hun-

Eros himself is in awe of you and extinguishes his flame; for he is in love with your charms and hides his torch, shamed by his defeat and fleeing censure. For Eros suffers the misfortune of Love; he who is immune to passion has fallen victim to it; the formerly untouchable one is captured and stands in admiration, and throws away his strongest weapon as he flees (you) the golden Eros (*τὸν χρυσέωντα*), under cover of darkness. I myself am overjoyed—I am more pleased than anyone to see that fearsome one afraid, the master mastered, the lord a slave. For the winged archer now has felt the power of arrows; Eros the torchbearer has had experience of fire, by you alone taught the things of which he had formerly been ignorant (lines 559–72).

The author goes on to assert that Manuel is a picture far superior to the one that Aetion painted of the wedding of Alexander to Roxana, and indeed to anything that Apelles himself could have depicted.<sup>29</sup>

Later in the poem, Manganeios develops a favorite *topos* of Comnenian encomiasts: the invitation to the emperor to rest from campaigning and “come in from the cold;”<sup>30</sup> Manuel is urged to enjoy a hot and relaxing bath. Of such a bath, his Graces (*Χάριτες*) have been so long deprived that they could justly chide him with “erotic blame” (*ώς ἀν προσονειδώσωσιν ἐρωτικήν σοι μέμψιν*) for letting them get so dirty (776–79). So let him come to Constantinople and bathe with them; Cupids (*Ἔρωτες*) will bring him hot water (781–82), serving him “erotically and slavishly” (789). The Graces then, in a short *ethopoia*, address a direct appeal to the emperor through the author: “We are ashamed to see you in our unwashed state, because the Love of the Cupids [or “the Eros of Eroses”] is far away (*ὅτιπερ ὑπερόδιος ὁ τῶν Ἐρωτῶν Ἔρως*)” (796–97). They beseech the author to intercede for them, and they express grat-

garians in 1150–51 (see F. Makk, *The Árpáds and the Comneni* [Budapest, 1989], 53–55), and from the fact that the author is petitioning the emperor (171 ff) from Philippopolis (22–23). In another petition (Mioni no. 30: *De Mangani*, ed. S. Bernardinello [Padua, 1972], no. 3), the author mentions that he has just returned from Bulgaria, and alludes to the recent birth of Manuel’s daughter, an event which the same author refers to elsewhere as happening in the 10th year of the reign (1153): Mioni no. 29, *Recueil*, ed. Miller, 341–43.

<sup>29</sup>Despite some uncertainty as to the manuscript reading of the painter’s name (Miller, RHC, *Hgr*, II, 744, and the Jeffreys read Astios; I read Aetios), the reference is clearly to the painting described by Lucian, *Herodotos or Aetion*: it showed Cupids (*Ἔρωτες*) putting Alexander to bed with Roxana, while others played with his armor. The ancient Greek painter Apelles was synonymous with pictorial excellence: *RE*, I, 2689 ff.

<sup>30</sup>E.g., Theodore Prodromos, *Historische Gedichte*, ed. W. Hörndner (Vienna, 1974), no. IX b–c, X 16 ff.

itude “that you take the trouble to write on behalf of us Graces, who are ἐρωτος αὐτοκράτορος ἐρωτῶν στερουμένων” (802–3)—a phrase that could be translated as “deprived of the love of the emperor of the Cupids,” or “deprived of the Cupids of the emperor of Love,” or even “deprived of the Cupids of Emperor Eros.” The passage is, on one level, an extended and playful allusion to the Cupids and Graces that had been part of the traditional cult and decor of secular bathing in antiquity.<sup>31</sup> But there is also an unmistakable note of real eroticism—and hence, a suggestion that the Erotes are real *amours*—in the allusion to Manuel taking a bath in the company of his personified female Graces. Mixed bathing was strictly forbidden by the church, even when the bathers were husband and wife, and the very hint of it conjured up visions of illicit pleasure.<sup>32</sup> When Hysminias eventually fell asleep after his first interrupted attempt to make love to Hysmine, he dreamt, among other things, that he was having a bath with her, in the course of which he received “all erotic favors,” and experienced a thrill of ice-cold pleasure as he sucked her breasts in the rising, steamy heat.<sup>33</sup>

In a slightly later poem, datable to the spring or summer of 1153, Manganeios celebrated Manuel’s performance in a joust in which he wielded an enormous banner.<sup>34</sup> The emperor reminded him of Bellerophon, or indeed of Eros. “For beholding you as you ride, O monarch, and sporting with your lance, I seem to behold another Bellerophon piercing the Chimaera—the Chimaera of Love. For you do not kill Cupids by despising *amours* (*οὐ γὰρ κτιννύεις ἐρωτες καταφρονῶν ἐρωτῶν*), but you consider contempt to be too abrupt. If I consider the spirit of your horsemanship, which unfolds like wings your golden drapery, I imagine the unseen winged archer” (15–22).

The third poem in which Manganeios associates Manuel with Eros dates from 1155–56, and is among the last of the author’s petitions for the grant of a living (*adelphaton*) at the Mangana mon-

<sup>31</sup>Louis Robert, *Hellénica*, IV (Paris, 1948), 77 ff, 129 ff.

<sup>32</sup>See canon 77 of the Council in Trullo, confirming canon 30 of the Council of Laodicea, and the commentary by Theodore Balsamon: *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων*, ed. G. A. Rhalles and A. Potles, II (Athens, 1852), 483–85; A. Berger, *Das Bad in der byzantinischen Zeit* (Munich, 1982), 41 ff; P. Magdalino, “Church, Bath and Diakonia in Medieval Constantinople,” *Church and People in Byzantium*, ed. R. Morris (Birmingham, 1990), 170.

<sup>33</sup>HH 5.1: ed. Hercher, *Erotici Scriptores*, 202.

<sup>34</sup>Mioni no. 17. At the end (line 71) the author makes another allusion to the recent birth of Manuel’s daughter (see above, note 28).

astery.<sup>35</sup> Introducing his subject, he says, “I daringly present an erotic example (ἐρωτικὸν παράδειγμα) . . . to the emperor of the Cupids/*amours*, full of Grace (τῷ τῶν ἐρώτων βασιλεῖ τῷ κεχαριτωμένῳ), and I bring in as witness Solomon, the most erotic of the kings of old (τὸν ἐρωτικώτερον τῶν πάλαι βασιλέων) (5–9). This time, the sexual significance of the allusions is quite unmistakable. Manganeios, who has received his living at the Mangana in word but not in deed, likens his predicament to that of the man in the case of an apocryphal judgment of Solomon.<sup>36</sup> The man, seized with love for an erotic woman (ὑπ’ ἔρωτος ἐρωτικοῦ γυναικοῦ), promised her great herds of sheep and oxen if she would sleep with him. But she kept putting him off in order to raise the price of intercourse—a practice of which the author claims to have bitter experience: “I too have suffered this for the sake of intercourse, losing all the fortune which formerly belonged to me.” Eventually the man had a dream in which the nude apparition of the woman satisfied his desire. He promptly lost interest in her, whereupon she took him to court for breach of promise. Solomon’s verdict was that since she had given him only the shadow of sexual fulfillment, she should receive only the shadows of the promised animals.

These texts leave no doubt that the concept of Eros the King was all but fully formulated in Byzantine court rhetoric of the 1150s. The imperial court at this time was a milieu where the emperor, Manuel Komnenos, was openly referred to as the βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐρώτων and compared to the ancient Greek god of love. The fact that these motifs occur in the works of only one author does not mean that they did not circulate more widely.<sup>37</sup> All it indicates is that Manganeios Prodromos, being a layman and speaking largely for himself, could afford to flatter sides of the emperor’s personality about which the other encomiasts known to us, being for the most part churchmen speaking on behalf of

<sup>35</sup> Mioni no. 14, *De Manganis*, ed. Bernardinello, no. 7. The author complains that he has received the grant only on paper; the poem must therefore shortly postdate the piece (Mioni no. 5, Bernardinello, *De Manganis*, no. 6) mentioned in another poem (Mioni no. 11, Bernardinello no. 12) written three years later, and datable to 1157–58 by its references to Manuel’s Italian diplomacy of 1157 and by its lack of reference to his Cilician campaign of 1158–59.

<sup>36</sup> The story is also told by John Zonaras (PG 119, col. 1020), who attributes the judgment to the Egyptian king Bokchoris.

<sup>37</sup> One slight indication that they did is provided by Constantine Manasses, who in an imperial oration of 1172–73 characterized Manuel as καὶ πυρφόρος καὶ πτερωτός: “Εστὶ δια νεισ-*dannyn* proizvedenija Konstantina Manassi,” ed. E. Kurtz, *Viz Vrem* 12 (1906), 91.

their institutions, had to remain silent. Thus in more than one poem, Manganeios clearly alludes to Manuel’s interest in astrology, which the church could not condone, and clerical encomiasts pointedly ignored.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, the erotic passages we have just examined were almost certainly allusions to Manuel’s equally notorious interest in extramarital sex. The petition with the risqué judgment of Solomon story is particularly striking in view of what Choniates has to say about Manuel’s youthful infidelities.<sup>39</sup> To address an emperor in this way was cheeky enough; to call Manuel βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐρώτων and to link him, in the same breath, with the philandering of Solomon, was tantamount to calling him the king of *amours*, and can only mean that Manuel positively relished his sexual reputation. Like the Ptochoprodromic poems, the petition reflects a court culture of frank secularity and levity, in which it is not difficult to imagine people making rhetorical play with the idea that Eros was king. In other words, the world of Manganeios Prodromos was an ideal milieu for the composition of *HH*, a work in which the enthronement of Eros involved more than a hint of pornography.

Of course, it is conceivable that the idea of ἐρως βασιλεὺς first appeared in the romance, and then influenced the rhetorical motif of Manuel as βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐρώτων. But on the face of it, it seems more plausible to regard the rhetorical wordplay of the encomia as marking the earlier stage in the genesis of the concept. There was, moreover, one particular element in the Eros of the romance which was more likely to have been inspired by than to have inspired the encomiastic image of Manuel I. This is the characterization of Eros as a youth. Since Manuel succeeded to the throne against what some saw as the superior claim of his elder brother Isaac, his youthfulness was an embarrassment which he and his propagandists

<sup>38</sup> Mioni no. 17, lines 40–42:  
ἀστεροσκόποι δράμετε, φωστήρ γάρ καθιππεύει  
ἔχει καὶ τοὺς διάτοντας τὸν γύροθεν ἀστέρας  
ἐκ τούτων τῆς κινήσεως προλέγετε τὸ μέλλον.

Mioni no. 6, “Sicilia e Normanni in Teodoro Prodromo,” ed. S. Bernardinello, *Byzantino-Sicula*, II (Palermo, 1975), lines 121–24:

τὸν ἀποτελεσματικὸν ἐτίμων ὑπὲρ ὄλους  
οἱ φοιτηταὶ τῶν παλαιῶν ἔτελνων φιλοσόφων  
πρώτως δὲ νῦν ἀριστέειν σοι ταύτην τὴν κλήσιν ἔγνων  
ὅς ἀποτελεσματικῷ τῶν ὑπὲρ νοῦν τροπαλών.

Manuel’s interest in astrology is attested not only by Choniates (ed. van Dieten, 95–96, 154, 169, 220–21) but also by the treatise which he composed in its defense, and which was rebutted by Michael Glykas: Michael Glykas, *Eἰς τὰς ἀπορίας τῆς θείας Γραφῆς*, I (Athens, 1906), ξζ’–πθ’, 476 ff.

<sup>39</sup> Choniates, ed. van Dieten, 54: νέος γάρ ὁ Μανουὴλ καὶ ἐρωτικός . . .

tried hard to present as a virtue<sup>40</sup>—by celebrating it as a sign of imperial rejuvenation and renewal,<sup>41</sup> by associating Manuel, in word and in picture, with the image of the young Christ Emmanuel,<sup>42</sup> by comparing him with David<sup>43</sup> and Alexander,<sup>44</sup> and by glorifying his manly vigor, to which not only his heroism as a warrior in the mold of Digenes Akritas<sup>45</sup> but also his performance as a lover bore eloquent witness. It is not implausible to see this unprecedented propaganda of imperial youth, with its insistence, contrary to received wisdom, that a mere lad could be an effective sovereign,<sup>46</sup> as one factor that helped to concentrate literary minds on the paradox of love's despotism.

In suggesting that the literary image of Eros Basileus originated in the context of the imperial cult of Manuel I, I am not denying the possibility of western influence either on the image or on other aspects of *HH*. Manuel was himself the westernizing Byzantine par excellence, and it is highly likely that in love, as in war, he modeled himself

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 219, using the word μερօαξ; Kinnamos, 184–85.

<sup>41</sup> Michael Italikos, ed. Gautier, 276; Manganeios Prodromos, Mioni no. 24 (1147), line 206: Constantinople says to Manuel ἐν σοι νεάζω καὶ σφριγώ καὶ γνώμαι καὶ δώμη. Also lines 217–19: ὡς γάρ ἀκμάζων καὶ σφριγῶν ὑπερτερεῖ γερόντων οὐτῶς ὑπὸ τῆς δώμης σου καὶ τοῦ στερεοῦ σου κράτους ἡ Νέα Ῥώμη γέγονε τῆς γραίας ὑπερτέρα.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Italikos, ed. Gautier, 294; M. Hendy, *Coinage and Money in the Byzantine Empire, 1081–1261* (Washington, D.C., 1969), 111 ff, esp. 126.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Italikos, ed. Gautier, 292; Manganeios Prodromos, Mioni no. 25 (1146), lines 36–40, 52–56.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., lines 106–8:

Ἄκμάζων ἦν Ἀλέξανδρος, ἀλλ' ἔτειψε Δαρεῖον, ἀνθεῖς καὶ σὺ τὸν Ἰουλὸν, ἀλλὰ σουλτάνον τρέπεις τὸν δυνατὸν δικραταύς, τὸν παλαιὸν δέ νέος.

Mioni, no. 24, lines 180 ff:

Οἱ Μακεδόνων βασιλεὺς δόδευων εἰς Λιβύην, ἐπειπερ εὐρε καθ' ὅδον μαντείον ἔμαντεύθη δὲ προφήτης προδηλῶν αὐτοῦ τὴν εὐτυχίαν, μειράκιον, ἐβόησεν, ἀνίκητον ὑπάρχεις ἔκεινον τὸνν τὸν χρησμὸν κ' ἀγάν σοι νῦν μηνῶν ἐξ ὧν γάρ εἶδον, βασιλεύ, λοιπὸν καὶ προφήτευώ ώς νικητῆς καὶ κράτιστος δόφθης κοσμοδεσπότης, καὶ μιμητῆς Ἐμμανουὴλ δι Μανουὴλ φανήσῃ, δέ νέος νῦν Ἀλέξανδρος καὶ μεῖζων Ἀλέξανδρον, ὡς νέος γάρ Ἀλέξανδρος, ὡς δὲ πιστὸς καὶ μεῖζων. . . .

<sup>45</sup> Michael Italikos, ed. Gautier, 286–87. Manuel was reminiscent of Digenes in the way he took on large numbers of enemy fighters singlehanded, sought single combat with enemy leaders, and hunted beasts that were larger than life: Kinnamos, 49–50, 110 ff, 189, 266–67; Manganeios Prodromos, Mioni no. 25, lines 36–51, 144–49; no. 27 *passim*; Michael δι τοῦ Ἀγιαλοῦ, ed. R. Browning, “A New Source on Byzantine-Hungarian Relations in the Twelfth Century,” *Balkan Studies* 2 (1961) [repr. in *idem, Studies on Byzantine History, Literature and Education* (London, 1977)], 198.

<sup>46</sup> See the oration of Theophylact of Ochrid to Constantine Doukas, *Theophylacti Achridensis opera*, ed. P. Gautier, I (Thessaloniki, 1980), 207: οὐδὲν οὐτῶν τὰ Ρωμαῖον διέφθειρεν ώς τὸ μηδένα εἶνα ἐπὶ τῶν προγμάτων στιβαρὸν γέροντα. . . .

on the secular ideals of the Latins in his entourage. It is surely significant that Manganeios, in one of the poems quoted above, compares Manuel to Eros while celebrating his performance in a tournament, that most essential ritual of western chivalry which Manuel promoted at his court.<sup>47</sup> The whole phenomenon of the rebirth of Greek secular fiction in the eleventh and twelfth century is best explained in terms of the crisis of Byzantine tradition under the new and painful impact of foreign cultures.<sup>48</sup> The twelfth-century romances show the influence of the west not only in their discreet borrowings from French vernacular literature, but also, and more fundamentally, in their very antiquarianism, in their purist assertion of “native,” Greek cultural roots.<sup>49</sup> My principal object in this article has been to rescue *HH* from the strange thirteenth-century isolation to which the logic of the search for western models has condemned it, and to restore it to what I consider to be its rightful place in the company of the four undeniably mid-twelfth-century romances. It may be the latest in the series, but not, surely, by much. Beaton is “inclined to see Makremvolítis as the contemporary of the Choniátis [sic] brothers in the early thirteenth century rather than of Anna Komníní [sic] in the early twelfth.”<sup>50</sup> Quite apart from the fact that the chronological gap is exaggerated—Anna was writing her *Alexiad* in the 1140s, and Michael Choniates began his literary career before 1180—the similarities between the Choniates’ works and *HH* have yet to be shown, whereas the links with writers active about 1150 are already clear, and have become clearer in the course of this study. Now that the image of Eros Basileus has emerged as one of those links, more account should be taken of the others, and particularly of the relationship between Makrembolites and the author to whom he was perhaps closest in language and technique, Nikephoros Basilakes. As Beaton has noted, one of the most novel features of *HH* is that it takes the form of an extended *ethopoia*—a type of rhetorical exercise whose creative potential Basilakes did much to develop.<sup>51</sup> Is it not time to consider the possibility that Makrembolites was his pupil?

While leaving this possibility for others to explore, I shall close by drawing attention to Basilakes’ *ethopoia* entitled “What the flautist Isminias

<sup>47</sup> Kinnamos, 47, 125; Choniates, ed. van Dieten, 108–9.

<sup>48</sup> Beaton, *Medieval Greek Romance*, 7 ff, 15 ff.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., chap. 4.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 22–23, 85.

would have said when forced by Alexander to play his flute on the destruction of Thebes.”<sup>52</sup> Isminias, whose name is phonetically identical to that of Makrembolites’ protagonist and narrator, pours out his resentment at being compelled by a tyrannical barbarian to commit the ultimate sacrilege of using his divine art to celebrate the ruin of his sacred fatherland. Isminias, like Hysminias, is a good Hellenic boy who is torn by a violent potentate from the warm embrace of *genos*, *patris*, and the cults of his ancestral gods, forcing him to violate their trust. Hysminias and Hysmine are finally freed from slavery by the priest of Apollo, who declares that Hellenes never, never, never shall be slaves of other Hellenes, and Isminias ends his soliloquy with an appeal to Alexander to respect the lord of the Muses, Apollo; he also refers to the Macedonian conquerors as “the common enemies of the Hellenes.” In the *ethopoieia*, as in the romance, Hellenism is the culture with which we, the readers, are expected to identify, and Hellenism is equated with decent family life in a *polis* that observes the cults of the Olympian gods; the power which threatens this way of life is imposing, but alien. Common to both works is a structural opposition, which is also basic to the other twelfth-century romances, at least those which have survived in full: the opposition between a distinctly nonpolitical Hellenism and the political might of a conquering despot.<sup>53</sup> The difference between *HH*

and the other romances is that in the former, the despot is not a barbarian king but Eros, the god of love. And yet this figure is far from being unambiguously a “good guy.” When Hysminias and his friend Kratisthenes, having looked at the mural of the Virtues in the garden, move on to contemplate the painting of Eros, they interpret it as follows: “Next to the Virtues are the Evils which have been fixed beside them: the youth has been created in accordance with this maxim, and art has adapted the creature to Nature.”<sup>54</sup> Even after Hysminias has fallen in love, he more than once calls Eros a tyrant. It cannot be coincidence, then, that Eros, like the barbarian kings in the *Rodanthe and Dosikles* of Theodore Prodromos and the *Drosilla and Charikles* of Niketas Eugenianos, is invested with an apparatus of kingship that is conspicuously missing from the other characters, including the gods themselves. In other words, the element in the romances closest to the reality of Byzantine society is firmly associated with “the other”; the reminiscences of the magnificent court of Manuel I are not attributes with which we automatically feel at home. Like Alexander, that other royal youth with whom Manuel was compared, Eros was an ambivalent figure. His very monarchy made him suspect in the eyes of the intellectuals who brought about his rehabilitation.

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<sup>52</sup> Ed. Pignani, 217–21. Pignani does not identify the source of the story, but this was clearly the Alexander romance of Pseudo-Callisthenes: *Historia Alexandri Magni*, ed. W. Kroll (Berlin, 1926), 54–62.

<sup>53</sup> In the *ethopoieia* there is also, as Pignani notes (p. 34), an opposition between the demands made by Alexander and

the laws of Nature, parallel to the conflict between Eros and *physis* which Basilakes examines in other character studies: “fra gli antagonisti della natura il maggiore resta pur sempre l’Amore.”

<sup>54</sup> *HH* 2.8: ed. Hercher, *Erotici Scriptores*, 174.